Implementation of the RIF Summer Success Model 2013 and 2014 – Executive Summary

Beth Sinclair
Richard N. White
Tamar Hellman
Kenne Dibner
Yavette Francis

February 2015

Executive Summary

Reading Is Fundamental (RIF's) Summer Success Model (SSM), funded through a U.S. Department of Education (ED) Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) grant, is an intervention designed to stem summer learning loss among elementary school students. This is the final report of the two-year independent evaluation of the SSM conducted by Policy Studies Associates (PSA). This evaluation examined implementation of the SSM in 2013 and 2014 using qualitative and quantitative data from five sources—site visits to schools, a student reading attitudes survey, event reports provided by RIF school coordinators and teachers, ED's Common Core of Data, and student-level Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) results.

The first section of this report describes program implementation in 2014 in terms of the participating districts and schools, implementation of the main components of the program, and the reading mindsets of s program participants. This section also describes changes in program implementation procedures and experiences from 2013 to 2014 and suggests possible additional changes RIF can make to strengthen the SSM in the future. The second section of the report examines the reading proficiency of program participants and changes in reading proficiency across one and two years of program participation. Finally, the last section of the report suggests ways to strengthen future evaluations of the SSM.

Program implementation in 2014

Participating SSM Districts, Schools and Students

There was growth in program participation and continued success in targeting to districts and schools. In the second year of the SSM, RIF expanded the program from 30 school districts in 15 states and the District of Columbia in 2013 to 38 school districts across the same states in 2014. In many districts, as in 2013, all the schools enrolling second-, third-, or fourth-grade students participated in the program. Overall, the SSM was in place in 168 schools in 2014, a nearly 20 percent increase over the 141 schools participating in 2013.

SSM participants had positive attitudes towards reading and books. Survey results suggest that the SSM aligned well with the needs of the participants. Overall, SSM participants reported positive attitudes about reading, particularly in their classrooms, and about themselves as readers, and they largely seemed to see reading as an important skill. Participants' responses showed less confidence, however, about their ability to read aloud, answer teachers' questions about their reading, or read as well as their friends do. Participants reported reading activities in the home were infrequent (both reading at bedtime and reading at home for fun).

Implementation of SSM Program Components

- ***There were clear favorites among the books in the multicultural classroom book collection***. The books teachers reported using most frequently from the 2014 collection were *The Day the Crayons Quit*, *Claudette*, *A Balloon for Isabel*, and

Memoirs of a Hamster. Teachers also reported they continued to use the 2013 collection, reporting that they most frequently used *City Dog, Country Frog*; *Pop! The Invention of Bubble Gum*; *Grandpa's Garden*; and *All the Water in the World*.

■ ***Schools held nearly 150 book distribution events***. Most schools held a single book distribution event. Eighty-six percent of book distribution events took place during school hours, an increase from 79 percent in 2013. Nearly all the schools (93 percent) chose to distribute all eight books at one time, rather than hold a second, summer book distribution event. The RIF coordinators in the schools reported far fewer challenges holding the book distribution events in 2014 than they did in 2013.

■ ***Schools used science, technology, engineering, arts, and math (STEAM) enrichment funds for a variety of activities***. Most of the reporting schools used the funds for a single enrichment activity, and 20 percent of the schools combined the enrichment activities with the book distribution event. RIF coordinators reported a wide variety of STEAM-related activities including visits from local nature centers or aquariums, a presentation on making electricity with windmills, community gardens, science nights, and author visits.

■ ***There were positive changes in the SSM from 2013 to 2014***. A common theme during the in-person interviews and on the various reporting forms was how much more smoothly the entire program rolled out in 2014 than it did in 2013, despite the fact that the program was serving approximately 50 percent more participants in 25 percent more schools. We identified three factors that were central to this improvement—program continuity from 2013 to 2014, better materials delivery, and improved timing. Based on its experiences with the SSM in 2013, RIF was able to build on and refine procedures for 2014. Delivery of materials to schools went more smoothly in 2014, with improved packaging and more manageable art supplies. Finally, since the SSM started earlier in the school year, schools were able to start recruiting participants as early as January, with some teachers obtaining parental consent during parent-teacher conferences.

Suggestions to Further Strengthen the SSM in the Future

Implementation of the SSM was strong but, based on input from program participants, RIF could further strengthen the program in two areas:

■ ***Promote more comprehensive use of the classroom collection***. Although the classroom book collection and accompanying teacher guides were well regarded by teachers participating in the SSM, evidence suggests that their value would be greater if RIF made three fairly minor modifications. To make it easier to routinely incorporate the classroom books into instruction, RIF could distribute the teacher guides to schools earlier, provide an index showing teachers the topic

areas covered by each book, and develop and disseminate an online video demonstrating a classroom lesson using one of the books from the collection.

■   *Further refine RIF-provided technical support*. As the SSM continues to mature, turnover of key staff will be an ongoing challenge. To plan for this, RIF could develop two tracks of training materials—one track for returning RIF school coordinators that includes abbreviated materials designed to refresh their knowledge and advise them of changes to the program from the previous year, and a second track with more detailed materials for new RIF school coordinators. School feedback also suggests that technical support could be strengthened with the use of online instructional videos and development of a community of practice.

ITBS Testing and Results from 2013 and 2014

The three metrics selected for this study—(1) Lexile reader measures, (2) National Percentile Rankings (NPRs), and (3) a growth model using National Standard Scores (NSSs)— each shed a slightly different light on the reading proficiency of the tested population. Lexiles use a vertically integrated scale that is independent of student grade level or the time of the school year in which the assessment is completed. Lexiles provide an accepted measure of student reading proficiency at baseline and can be used to measure absolute change in reading proficiency over multiple testing periods. NPRs give a sense of how SSM participants' scores at any point in time fit in the broader context of second-, third-, and fourth-grade students nationally (using both nationally representative norming population norms and a low socioeconomic status (low-SES) national norming population). The growth model provides a set of estimates of the change in scores to be expected from participants according to their specific level of baseline proficiency, using vertically integrated NSSs to calculate the median gain expected in NSSs. With this model, the expectation is that 50 percent of participants will meet or exceed their growth targets and 50 percent of participants will fall short of the expected targets.

SSM Participants Tested

In 2013, 10,071 SSM participants completed both spring and fall assessments. This figure increased to 18,058 in 2014. Scores from both 2013 and 2014 were available for 5,505 participants (or 55 percent of all 2013 SSM participants with linked scores). The distribution of participants with linked scores was similar to that of all program participants (those who took the ITBS, regardless of whether they had a matched score) by grade, gender, urbanicity, and level of school poverty, as were the characteristics of participants with test scores for both years.

Baseline Reading Proficiency

  Spring baseline Lexile reader measures were higher at each grade level. Overall, the distribution of the performance of SSM participants on their spring ITBS in 2014 was similar to that observed in spring 2013. As would be expected with a vertically aligned assessment, the average performance of participants in Lexiles at baseline was higher at higher grade levels (Exhibit A).

Exhibit A
2013 and 2014 Lexile reader measures in spring, by grade level
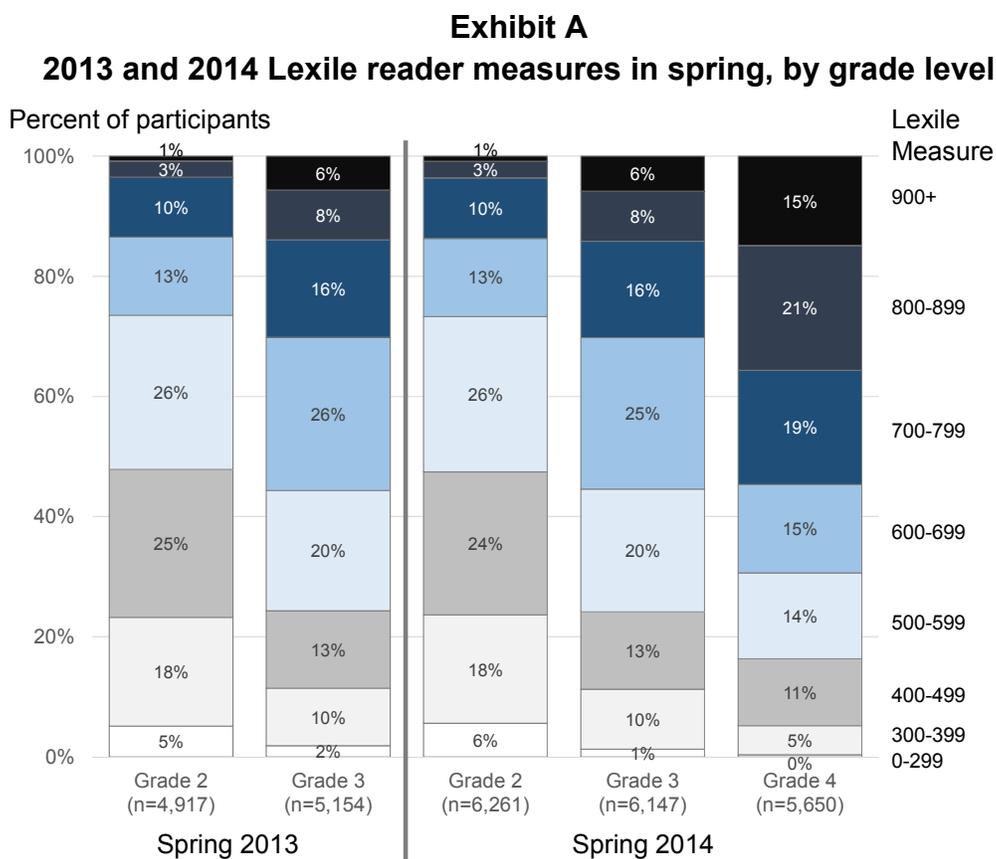

Exhibit reads: Five percent of second-graders taking the ITBS in spring 2013 achieved a Lexile reader measure between 0-299L. One percent of this group of participants achieved a Lexile reader measure that was 900L or higher.

  SSM participants on average scored slightly below their peers at baseline when compared to the national norming population. In terms of NPRs, we found that the average Lexile reader measure of 510L for second-grade participants in spring 2014 was in the 45th percentile when compared to the national norms, but in the 67th percentile when compared to low-SES norms. The findings for third- and fourth-grade participants were similar. For third-grade participants, the average Lexile reader measure of 614L corresponded to the 41st percentile nationally and the 67st percentile for the low-SES norming population. The fourth-grade participants, scoring 703L on average, were in the 35th percentile nationally and in the 58th percentile among their low-SES peers.

Changes in ITBS Scores—Lexile Reader Measures, NSS, and Expected Growth

On average, SSM participants did not experience summer reading loss in absolute terms. In both years and at each grade level, more than half of the SSM participants achieved an increase in their Lexile reader measure from spring to fall. SSM participants in the third grade achieved the greatest gains between spring and fall in both testing cycles.

Second- and third-grade SSM participants lost ground from spring to fall in terms of national and low-SES NPRs. Although on average SSM participants experienced gains in their Lexile reader measures from spring to fall, participants in the second and third grades lost ground to their peers (i.e., in national percentile rankings). This was the case in both 2013 and 2014 and in terms of both national and low-SES norming populations. Fourth-grade SSM participants achieved baseline national percentile rankings in 2014 that were lower than those of the second- and third-graders, although the fourth-graders maintained their rankings in fall 2014.

Nearly half of SSM participants met or exceeded their one-year, NSS projected growth target. The growth model projects results for the median population, which means that 50 percent of students are expected to meet or exceed their growth targets and 50 percent of students are expected to fall short of the expected targets. The performance of SSM participants aligned well with the growth model's projected results: in 2013, 44 percent of SSM participants met or exceeded their one-year projected growth on the ITBS between spring and fall, and in 2014, 46 percent of SSM participants met or exceeded their projected growth (Exhibit B).

PSA used two approaches to analyze two-year growth and found lower percentages of SSM participants met expected growth when viewed over a longer period of time.

- *Expected growth from spring 2013 to fall 2014*. Overall, 40 percent of SSM participants with two years of ITBS data met their two-year expected growth target from spring 2013 to fall 2014. Unlike the one-year results described earlier, in which a greater percentage of participants with lower baseline scores met their expected growth target, a greater percentage of participants with higher baseline scores met their expected growth target over the longer period of time.

- *Expected growth in two separate summer periods*. Using four performance categories—meeting growth expectations in both years, meeting expectations in 2014 but not 2013, meeting expectations in 2013 but not 2014, and not meeting growth expectations over either summer—21 percent of two-year participants were found to have met growth expectations in both summers.

Exhibit B
Distribution of SSM participants in 2013 and 2014,
by grade level and by baseline NSS

Grade and baseline reading level (NSS)		National percentile ranking (NPR) for baseline scores	Expected point gain (using low-SES norms)	Percent meeting or exceeding target point gain in:	
				2013	2014
Grade 2					
Low	143 and below	Below 10 NPR	2	76%	74%
	144-151	10 to 24 NPR	3	49	55
	152-161	25 to 49 NPR	4	42	49
	162-172	50 to 74 NPR	5	42	43
	173-184	75 to 90 NPR	7	32	30
High	185 and higher	90+ NPR	7	16	20
Overall Grade 2				**39**	**42**
				(n=4,917)	*(n=6,238)*
Grade 3					
Low	151 and below	Below 10 NPR	2	84	81
	152-160	10 to 24 NPR	3	56	60
	161-174	25 to 49 NPR	3	50	46
	175-188	50 to 74 NPR	5	42	46
	189-205	75 to 90 NPR	7	44	45
High	206 and higher	90+ NPR		34	34
Overall Grade 3				**48**	**49**
				(n=5,154)	*(n=6,147)*
Grade 4					
Low	158 and below	Below 10 NPR	2		72
	159-170	10 to 24 NPR	3		55
	171-186	25 to 49 NPR	4		46
	187-205	50 to 74 NPR	5		43
	206-226	75 to 90 NPR	6		39
High	227 and higher	90+ NPR	6		28
Overall Grade 4					**46**
					(n=5,650)
All SSM Participants				**44%**	**46%**

Exhibit reads: Second graders who scored 143 NSS or lower in the spring were below the 10th NPR and were expected to increase this score by two points in fall. The percent of second graders with this baseline score who met or exceeded this point gain was
76 percent among 2013 SSM participants and 74 percent among 2014 SSM participants.

Suggestions for Future Research

While the findings from the current study provide an important contribution to the study of summer learning loss, there are four ways in which RIF could strengthen the design for future evaluations. First, future evaluations of the SSM could include a school-level randomized control trial (RCT) that would allow the comparison of changes in literacy proficiency achieved by SSM participants versus those achieved by similar students who did not participate. Second, use of an implementation rubric program-wide would provide important contextual information

for the analysis. Third, a fall survey of SSM participants would generate data on how they used the books they received at the end of the school year, again to provide context for findings from the assessments administered for the study. Finally, collection of student-level information on eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch and on race/ethnicity would allow more exploration of performance differences at the individual level.